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Senate votes to keep sexual predators out of the classroom

LANSING – Sex offenders would be stopped from working in schools under legislation that passed the Michigan Senate today, announced Sen. Laura Toy, R-Livonia.

The Senate approved parts of the Student Safety Initiative on Wednesday. Senate-sponsored bills in the package were passed earlier and are before the House of Representatives for consideration.

Sponsored by Toy, Senate Bill 617 will create Student Safety Zones by prohibiting convicted sex offenders from living, working or loitering within 1,000 feet of a school.

“Children are Michigan’s most vulnerable residents,” Toy said. “We need to help make sure that they are safe when they go to school everyday. Our children deserve to be safe while they’re learning at school.”

The Student Safety Initiative includes:

- Requiring background checks on all paid school and day-care center employees and prohibiting anyone with a sex offense from being employed;
- Revoking teaching certification for convicted sex offenders; and
- Requiring all school employees to self-report any criminal charge to their school district and to the Department of Education.

“Parents should have every assurance that the schools where they send their children are the safest possible places,” said Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming. “No predator belongs in our schools, in our daycare centers or anywhere near our children. The work we did today will help give parents some much-needed peace of mind.”

The Student Safety Initiative is a bicameral effort that comes on the heels of a series of reports in the Detroit News showing repeated cases of sex offenders being allowed access to children in Michigan schools.

At least 35 Michigan school employees, a majority of whom are teachers, have been charged or convicted of sexual misconduct in recent months, according to recent news reports.

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Editor’s note: Comments from Sen. Toy may be downloaded from the Michigan Senate Republican Majority audiowire at: <http://www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/audiowire/toy/index.htm>